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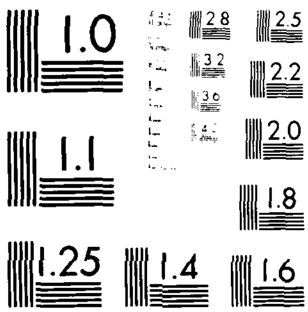

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AD-A145 189

Cognitive Science Program

NEURAL CONTROL OF THE DIRECTION OF COVERT VISUAL ORIENTING

Michael I. Posner

Technical Report 84-4

University of Oregon

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) In cases of unilateral parietal damage patients have difficulty in handling stimuli contralateral to the lesion. Our study shows a major problem is in disengaging attention from its current focus to deal with targets in a contralateral direction irrespective of the visual field in which the target occurs. This is true for both right and left-sided lesions. It is likely that the visual field and thus the hemisphere which first receives the target information is also important, but that is not clear in our results. The study confirms a suggestion by Kinsbourne (1977) that each		

20. hemisphere directs attention in a contralateral direction. It implies that for directing attention the two hemispheres must be constantly interchanging control and thus sharing information from the two hemifields. These studies suggest the importance of control of the location of covert attention prior to the assessment of lateralization of cognitive functions.

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Neural Control of the Direction of Covert Visual Orienting[1]

Michael I. Posner

University of Oregon, Eugene

Frances J. Friedrich, John Walker & Robert Rafal

Laboratory of Cognitive Neuropsychology

Good Samaritan Hospital, Portland, Oregon

Lesions of the parietal lobe have effects on the ability to attend to information that arises from locations in space contralateral to the lesion (see De Renzi, 1982 for a review). We have attempted to discover the specific nature of the attentional deficit involved (Posner, Cohen & Rafal, 1982; Posner, Walker, Friedrich & Rafal, 1983). Our studies have involved an experimental paradigm which has been used widely with normals (Posner, 1980) to study the ability to orient attention in visual space. It requires the person to fixate at a central location. Cues are introduced at different locations on the CRT display. The cues are thought to cause a shift of attention. The shift of attention is measured by examining the latency of response to target events that occur at the cued location in comparison to other locations at the same distance from fixation.

When patients with parietal lesions were studied using this paradigm we found a very great elevation in response time in cases when attention was drawn to positions in the visual field ipsilateral to the lesion and targets went to the contralateral field.

1. Draft of paper presented to Psychonomic Society, November 1983. This research supported by NIMH grant 1RO1 MN38503-01 and ONR contract #N0014-83-K-1601.

Similar dramatic elevations in reaction time are also found when attention is cued to a location at fixation and targets are presented in the contralateral field as illustrated in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The effect of a central cue on a contralateral target rules out explanations which emphasize the power of the ipsilateral event to extinguish contralateral events, or are based on expectancy of the target location (since targets were equally probable on either side following a central cue) or eye movements in response to the ipsilateral cue.

We have considered the shift of visual attention produced by a peripheral cue to consist of three more elementary mental operations shown in Figure 2. These are disengagement from the current focus of attention, movement to the target loction and engagement with the target.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Our finding that the main impairment in the cases of parietal lobe lesions occurs only when subjects are cued to an incorrect location suggests that the lesions main affect is on the ability of a target contralateral to the lesion to serve to disengage the person from the current attentional focus. Some of the patients also show a slowing of reaction times on the side contralateral to the lesion even after attention has been cued there. This suggests a deficit in the engagement function. However, other patients show no dificits in either the move or engage function,

but still show deficits in the disengagement operation.

These results suggest that the pareital lobe represents an important route by which attention can be oriented toward a visual stimulus. The current paper is addressed to additional details on how this is accomplished. One possibility is that stimuli coming directly to the lesioned hemipshere fail to reach attention in sufficient strength to produce a reorienting. This view is consonant with the term hemispheric inattention which is commonly applied to the syndrome resulting from parietal lesions (Weinstein & Freedland, 1977). A closely related theory suggests that what is important is not the hemisphere to which the stimulus is directly projected but the position of the stimulus with respect to the gravitational straight ahead or hemispace (Bowers, Heitman, & Van Den Abell, 1981). A third view suggests that the effect arises because each hemisphere controls the operations which orient covert attention in the contralateral direction. This view seems close to that suggested by Kinsbourne, 1977. Usually covert attention and overt attention are thought to be completely confounded since we tend to look at what we are interested in. However, the covert orienting paradigm discussed above allows a dissociation of the two and thus, a test of whether each hemisphere appears to control shifts of attention in a direction contralateral to the lesion (e.g., leftward for right side lesions).

In this experiment subjects look at a large cathode ray tube on which is plotted a central fixation cross flanked by three boxes located 3, 6 and 9 degrees to immediate left and right of

fixation. Each trial begins with 150 millisec brightening of one of the six boxes. Either 100 or 600 millisec following brightening a star is plotted in one of the boxes (target). The task is to respond to the target as quickly as possible. There are four general types of trials. On VALID trials the target appears at the cued location. On CROSS trials the cue occurs at the center position on one side and the target at the center position on the opposite side. On Move trials the cue occurs at the near or far position on one side and the target at the center position of the same side. The display, trial types and frequency of trial type are illustrated in Figure 3.

Insert Figure 3 about here

On two thirds of the trials in each block the time between cue and target was 100 millisec and on the remaining one third of the trials it was 600 millisec. The 100 millisec interval insured that subjects could not shift their eyes between cue and target. The use of short and long SOA trials virtually eliminates anticipations at the short interval although a few occur for normals at the long interval.

The basic paradigm has been run on nine young normal subjects and on seven parietal patients who have been shown previously to have problems with disengaging attention to targets contralateral to the lesion.

The results for the nine normal subjects indicate that the only statistically significant effect other than SOA is the interaction between direction of movement and visual field

($p<.05$). This interaction was replicated in another study of ten young normals. It indicates that targets involving movements outward from the near cue to center give systematically longer RTs than movements inward from the far cue to the center. Thus, normals show better orienting when the cue is further from the fovea than the target.

The results for the seven parietal patients are shown for valid trials (in comparison with normals) in Figure 4. The results for valid, cross and move trials at the two delay intervals are shown in Figure 5a, b. Statistical analysis shows main effects of interval ($p<.01$), field ($p<.01$) and condition ($p<.001$).

Insert Figure 4 and 5a,b

At both intervals cross trials are longer than valid trials and this tends to be greater in the contralateral field than in the ipsilateral field. In general, times in the contralateral field are longer than in the ipsilateral. A sub analysis of the move trials shows RTs for movements in a direction contralateral to the lesion are slower than for those ipsilateral to the lesion ($p<.05$). There is also an interaction between direction and field ($p<.05$). Movements in the ipsilateral direction do not show any difference between the two fields. This effect is very striking when compared to the other three conditions but may be misleading. Movements in the ipsilateral direction are outward when they occur in the ipsilateral field and inward when they occur in the contralateral field. Since normals are faster on inward movements it is possible that the flat function for

ipsilateral movements is due to a confound with the inward versus outward effect. In any case the data show that responses to the very same target location are faster overall when they require covert orienting in the direction ipsilateral to the lesion.

Our results suggest that each hemipshere is responsible for control of covert attention in the contralateral direction. This fits very well with the theory outlined by Kinsbourne (1977). However, with normals we have found little evidence that language tasks automatically produce a tendency to favor the right field or rightward shifts of covert attention within a field, thus not all aspects of his theory may fit our results.

The tendency of patients to show particular difficulty with reorienting toward targets contralateral to their current focus of attention does much to explain a number of conflicting results in the clinical neuropsychological literature. For example, it has long been known that right parietal patients will sometimes tend to neglect the left side of objects even when they are presented at fixation or directly to the unlesioned hemisphere. Since attention is often directed to the centroid of objects, if leftward covert scans are always difficult, one would expect to find problems with the left side of object no matter where they are presented. Since the focus of covert attention is dependent on the exact form of the object one would expect, as is observed, variability when such neglect occurs. When the gravitational straight ahead and the fixation point of the eyes are misaligned as during tests of the hemispatial neglect hypotheses (Bowers, Heilman & Van Den Abell, 1981) one would expect two contradictory

influences on the direction of covert attention , one by the fixation point and one by the gravitational straight ahead. If covert attention is not controlled by the experimenter one might expect inconsistent results that depart from a stict hemispheric solution.

A larger question is whether the covert attention system that we are studying is a module that can be engaged only by visual tasks or whether it is part of a system whose capaity is shared by different cognitive systems. If the latter one would expect engagement in non-visual tasks to influence the tendency toward poorer processing of stimuli in a direction contralateral to the lesion. This is one focus of our current patient studies.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Reaction times for six parietal patients following neutral cues (triangles) and for invalid trials with peripheral cues (circles). Filled characters are ipsilateral targets and open contralateral.

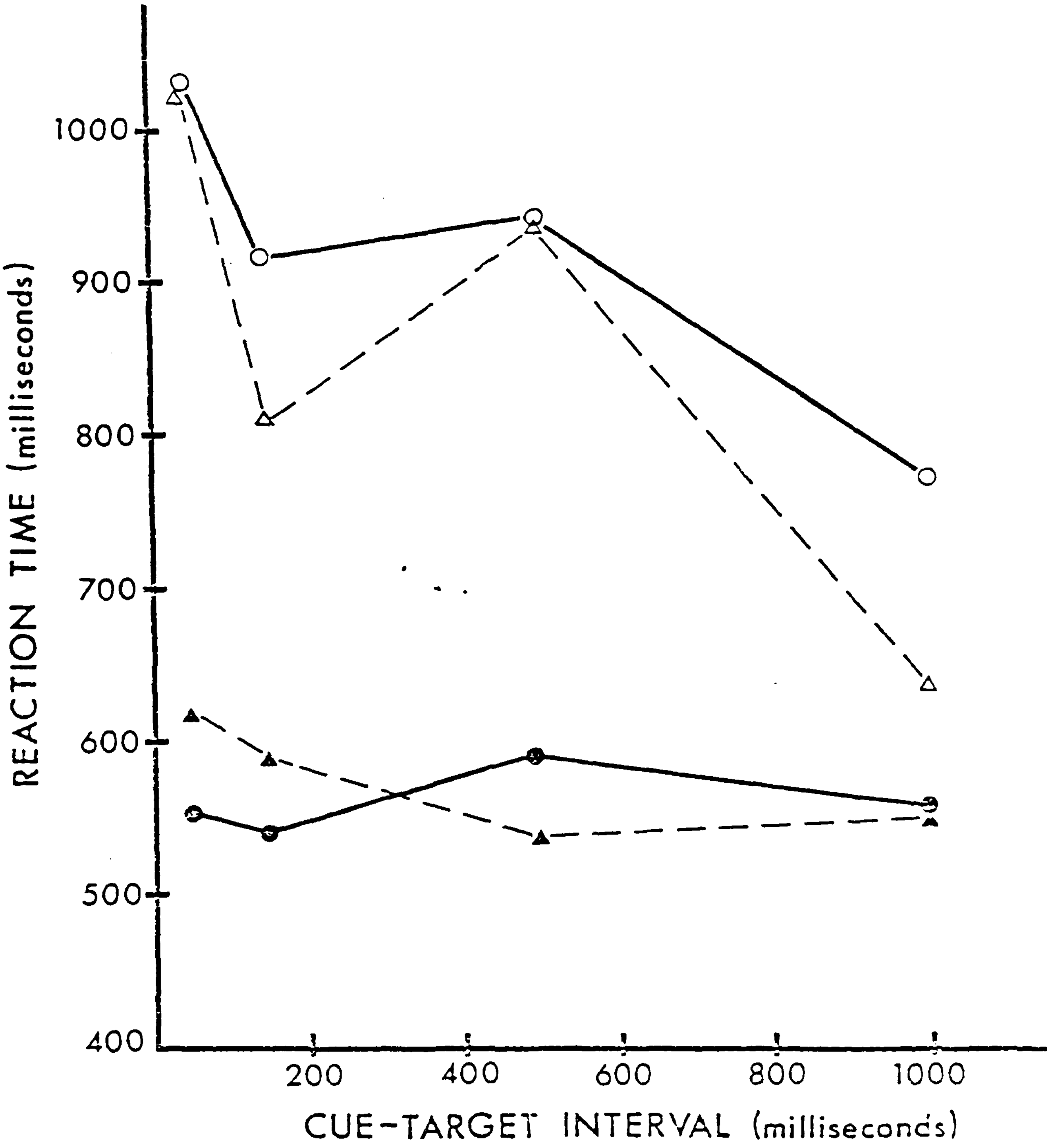
Figure 2. Three putative mental operations involved in shifting covert attention to a target.

Figure 3. Trial types and frequency within a block of 150 trials. Radiating lines from the hexagon indicates a cue. The star figure inside the hexagon represents a target.

Figure 4. Reaction times as a function of target location for valid trials. Upper curves represent results of five parietal patients in fields ipsilateral and contralateral to the lesion. Lower figures are for ten normals in left and right visual field.

Figure 5a. Reaction times for ~~five~~ patients in valid, cross and within field trials. The latter are broken down into within field movements in the ipsilateral and contra lateral directions. Data are shown separately by visual field (e.g. ipsilateral field is on the side of the lesion and contralateral opposite the lesion.) Data are from the 100 msec SOA.

Figure 5b. Data are the same as 5a but at 600 msec SOA.


REACTION TIME (milliseconds)
1000
900
800
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600
500
400
200
400
600
800
1000
CUE-TARGET INTERVAL (milliseconds)

Figure 1

Operations Involved in Covert Orienting

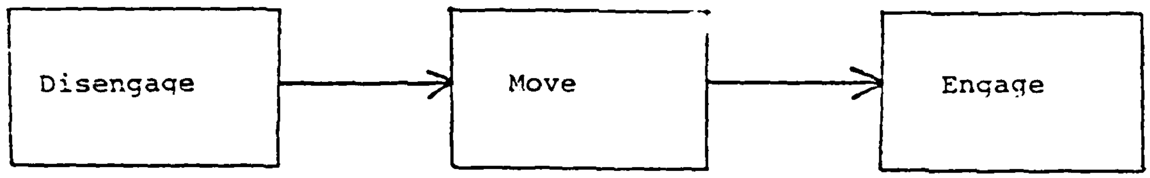


Figure 2

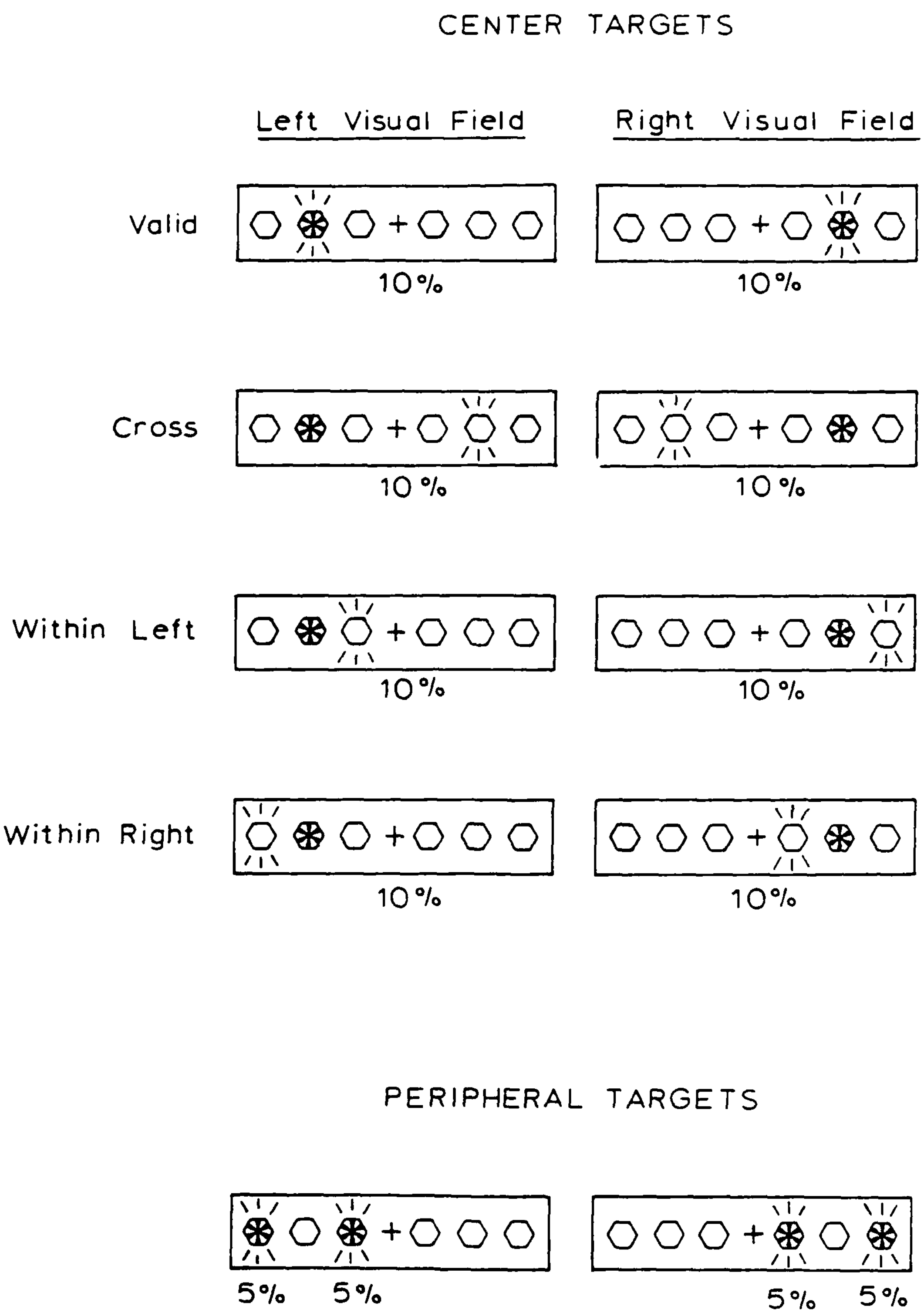
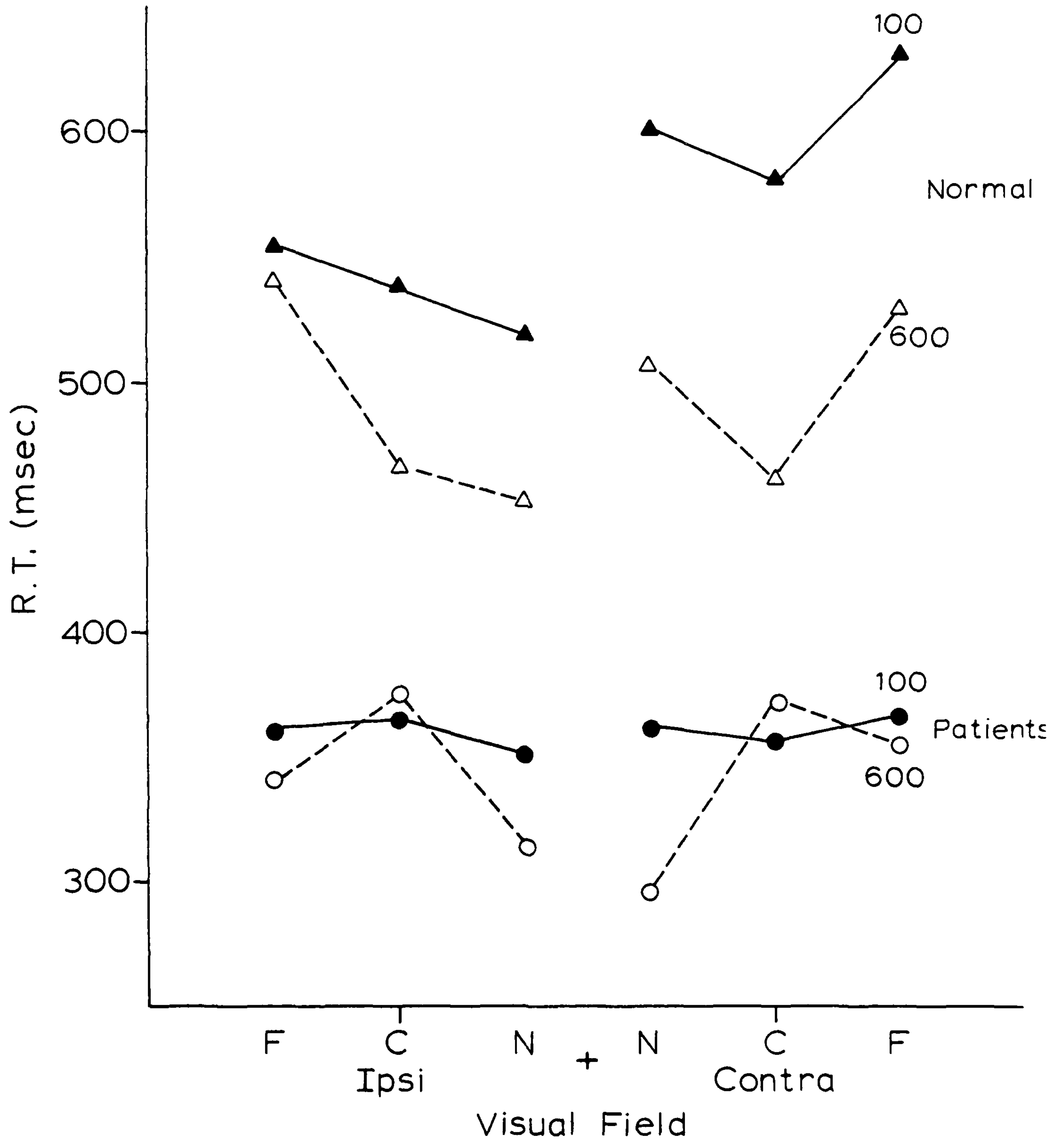
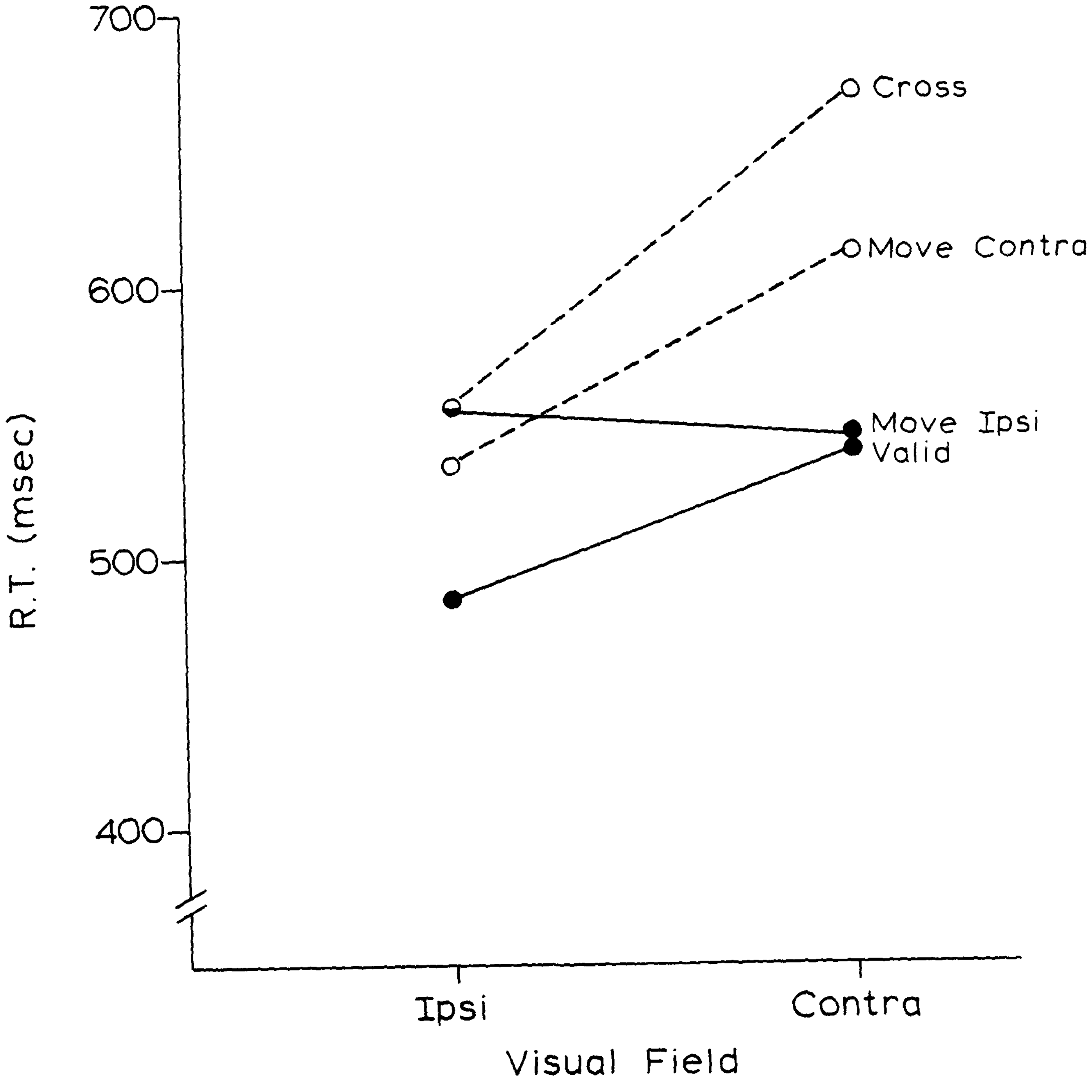

CENTER TARGETS
Left Visual Field
Right Visual Field
Valid
10%
10%
Cross
10 %
10 %
Within Left
10 %
10 %
Within Right
10%
10%
PERIPHERAL TARGETS
5% 5%
5% 5%

Figure 3


100
600
500
400
300
R.T. (msec)
Normal
600
100
Patients
600
F
C
N
+
N
C
F
Ipsi
Contra
Visual Field
Figure 4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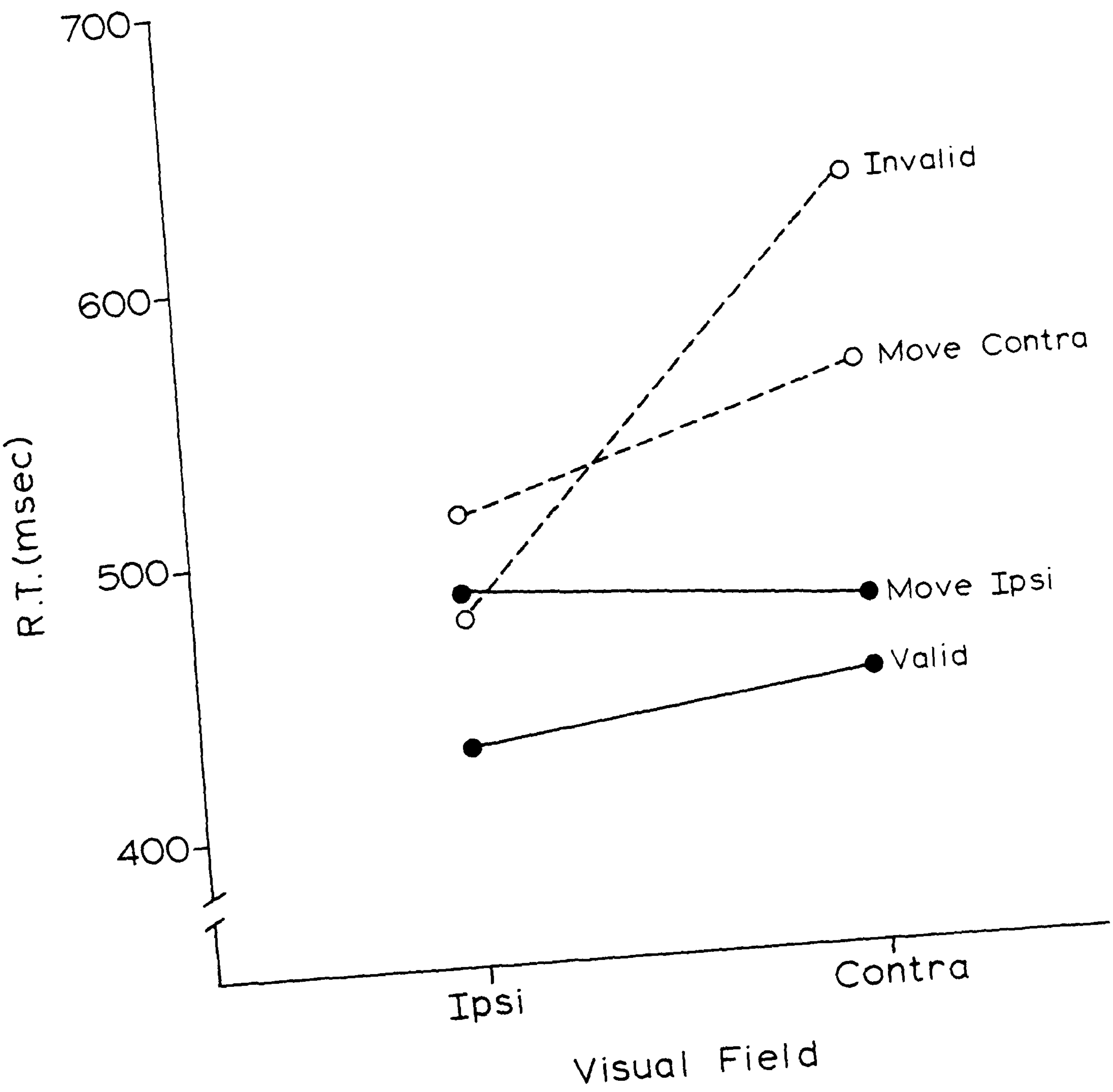
R.T. (msec)
Cross
Move Contra
Move Ipsi
Valid
Ipsi
Contra
Visual Field

Figure 5 a



700
600
500
400
R.T. (msec)
Invalid
Move Contra
Move Ipsi
Valid
Ipsi
Contra
Visual Field

Figure 5 b

Navy

1 Dr. Ed Aiken
Navy Personnel R&D Center
San Diego, CA 92152

1 Dr. Thomas Sticht
Navy Personnel R&D Center
San Diego, CA 92152

1 CDR Robert J. Biersner
Naval Medical R&D Command
National Naval Medical Center
Bethesda, MD 20814

1 Dr. Nick Bond
Office of Naval Research
Liaison Office, Far East
APO San Francisco, CA 96503

1 Dr. Fred Chang
Navy Personnel R&D Center
San Diego, CA 92152

1 Dr. Stanley Collyer
Office of Naval Technology
800 N. Quincy Street
Arlington, VA 22217

1 CDR Mike Curran
Office of Naval Research
800 N. Quincy St.
Code 270
Arlington, VA 22217

1 DR. PAT FEDERICO
Code P13
NPRDC
San Diego, CA 92152

1 Dr. Jim Hollan
Code 14
Navy Personnel R & D Center
San Diego, CA 92152

1 Dr. Ed Hutchins
Navy Personnel R&D Center
San Diego, CA 92152

1 Dr. Norman J. Kerr
Chief of Naval Technical Training
Naval Air Station Memphis (75)
Millington, TN 38054

Navy

1 Dr. William L. Maloy (02)
Chief of Naval Education and Training
Naval Air Station
Pensacola, FL 32508

1 Dr. Joe McLachlan
Navy Personnel R&D Center
San Diego, CA 92152

1 Dr William Montague
NPRDC Code 13
San Diego, CA 92152

1 Library, Code P201L
Navy Personnel R&D Center
San Diego, CA 92152

1 Technical Director
Navy Personnel R&D Center
San Diego, CA 92152

6 Commanding Officer
Naval Research Laboratory
Code 2627
Washington, DC 20390

1 Office of Naval Research
Code 433
800 N. Quincy SStreet
Arlington, VA 22217

1 Office of Naval Research
Code 441NP
800 N. Quincy Street
Arlington, VA 22217

6 Personnel & Training Research Group
Code 442PT
Office of Naval Research
Arlington, VA 22217

1 Psychologist
ONR Branch Office
1030 East Green Street
Pasadena, CA 91101

1 Office of the Chief of Naval Operations
Research Development & Studies Branch
OP 115
Washington, DC 20350

1 Dr. Bernard Rimland (01C)
Navy Personnel R&D Center
San Diego, CA 92152

Navy

1 Dr. Robert G. Smith
Office of Chief of Naval Operations
OP-987H
Washington, DC 20350

1 Dr. Alfred F. Smode, Director
Department N-7
Naval Training Equipment Center
Orlando, FL 32813

1 Dr. Richard Snow
Liaison Scientist
Office of Naval Research
Branch Office, London
Box 39
FPO New York, NY 09510

1 Dr. Richard Sorensen
Navy Personnel R&D Center
San Diego, CA 92152

1 Dr. Thomas Sticht
Navy Personnel R&D Center
San Diego, CA 92152

1 Roger Weissinger-Baylon
Department of Administrative Sciences
Naval Postgraduate School
Monterey, CA 93940

Marine Corps

1 Special Assistant for Marine
Corps Matters
Code 100M
Office of Naval Research
800 N. Quincy St.
Arlington, VA 22217

1 DR. A.L. SLAFKOSKY
SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR (CODE RD-1)
HQ, U.S. MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, DC 20380

Army

1 Technical Director
U. S. Army Research Institute for the
Behavioral and Social Sciences
5001 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22333

1 Commander, U.S. Army Research Institute
for the Behavioral & Social Sciences
ATTN: PERI-BR (Dr. Judith Orasanu)
5001 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22333

1 Dr. Robert Sasmor
U. S. Army Research Institute for the
Behavioral and Social Sciences
5001 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22333

Air Force

1 U.S. Air Force Office of Scientific
Research
Life Sciences Directorate, NL
Bolling Air Force Base
Washington, DC 20332

1 Dr. Earl A. Alluisi
HQ, AFHRL (AFSC)
Brooks AFB, TX 78235

1 Mr. Raymond E. Christal
AFHRL/MOE
Brooks AFB, TX 78235

1 Dr. Alfred R. Fregly
AFOSR/NL
Bolling AFB, DC 20332

1 Dr. Genevieve Haddad
Program Manager
Life Sciences Directorate
AFOSR
Bolling AFB, DC 20332

1 Dr. John Tangney
AFOSR/NL
Bolling AFB, DC 20332

1 Dr. Joseph Yasatuke
AFHRL/LRT
Lowry AFB, CO 80230

Department of Defense

12 Defense Technical Information Center
Cameron Station, Bldg 5
Alexandria, VA 22314
Attn: TC

1 Military Assistant for Training and
Personnel Technology
Office of the Under Secretary of Defens
for Research & Engineering
Room 3D129, The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

1 Major Jack Thorpe
DARPA
1400 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22209

1 Dr. Robert A. Wisher
OUSDRE (ELS)
The Pentagon, Room 3D129
Washington, DC 20301

Civilian Agencies

1 Dr. Everett Palmer
Mail Stop 239-3
NASA-Ames Research Center
Moffett Field, CA 94035

1 Dr. Joseph L. Young, Director
Memory & Cognitive Processes
National Science Foundation
Washington, DC 20550

Private Sector

1 Dr. John R. Anderson
Department of Psychology
Carnegie-Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

1 Dr. Alan Baddeley
Medical Research Council
Applied Psychology Unit
15 Chaucer Road
Cambridge CB2 2EF
ENGLAND

1 Patricia Baggett
Department of Psychology
University of Colorado
Boulder, CO 80309

1 Mr. Avron Barr
Department of Computer Science
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305

1 Dr. Menucha Birenbaum
School of Education
Tel Aviv University
Tel Aviv, Ramat Aviv 69978
Israel

1 Dr. John S. Brown
XEROX Palo Alto Research Center
3333 Coyote Road
Palo Alto, CA 94304

1 Dr. Glenn Bryan
6208 Poe Road
Bethesda, MD 20817

1 Dr. Bruce Buchanan
Department of Computer Science
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305

1 Dr. Alan Baddeley
Medical Research Council
Applied Psychology Unit
15 Chaucer Road
Cambridge CB2 2EF
ENGLAND

1 Dr. Jaime Carbonell
Carnegie-Mellon University
Department of Psychology
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Private Sector

1 Dr. Pat Carpenter
Department of Psychology
Carnegie-Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

1 Dr. Micheline Chi
Learning R & D Center
University of Pittsburgh
3939 O'Hara Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

1 Dr. William Clancey
Department of Computer Science
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94306

1 Dr. Allan M. Collins
Bolt Beranek & Newman, Inc.
50 Moulton Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

1 Dr. Lynn A. Cooper
LRDC
University of Pittsburgh
3939 O'Hara Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

1 Dr. Emmanuel Donchin
Department of Psychology
University of Illinois
Champaign, IL 61820

1 Dr. Jeffrey Elman
University of California, San Diego
Department of Linguistics
La Jolla, CA 92093

1 ERIC Facility-Acquisitions
4833 Rugby Avenue
Bethesda, MD 20014

1 Dr. Anders Ericsson
Department of Psychology
University of Colorado
Boulder, CO 80309

1 Mr. Wallace Feurzeig
Department of Educational Technology
Bolt Beranek & Newman
10 Moulton St.
Cambridge, MA 02238

Private Sector

1 Professor Donald Fitzgerald
University of New England
Armidale, New South Wales 2351
AUSTRALIA

1 Dr. John R. Frederiksen
Bolt Beranek & Newman
50 Moulton Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

1 Dr. Don Gentner
Center for Human Information Processing
University of California, San Diego
La Jolla, CA 92093

1 Dr. Dedre Gentner
Bolt Beranek & Newman
10 Moulton St.
Cambridge, MA 02138

1 Dr. Robert Glaser
Learning Research & Development Center
University of Pittsburgh
3939 O'Hara Street
PITTSBURGH, PA 15260

1 Dr. Joseph Goguen
SRI International
333 Ravenswood Avenue
Menlo Park, CA 94025

1 Dr. Daniel Gopher
Faculty of Industrial Engineering
& Management
TECHNION
Haifa 32000
ISRAEL

1 DR. JAMES G. GREENO
LRDC
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
3939 O'HARA STREET
PITTSBURGH, PA 15213

1 Dr. Barbara Hayes-Roth
Department of Computer Science
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 95305

Private Sector

1 Dr. Joan I. Heller
Graduate Group in Science and
Mathematics Education
c/o School of Education
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720

1 Dr. James R. Hoffman
Department of Psychology
University of Delaware
Newark, DE 19711

1 Melissa Holland
American Institutes for Research
1055 Thomas Jefferson St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20007

1 Glenda Greenwald, Ed.
Human Intelligence Newsletter
P. O. Box 1163
Birmingham, MI 48012

1 Dr. Earl Hunt
Dept. of Psychology
University of Washington
Seattle, WA 98105

1 Dr. Marcel Just
Department of Psychology
Carnegie-Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

1 Dr. Steven W. Keele
Dept. of Psychology
University of Oregon
Eugene, OR 97403

1 Dr. Scott Kelso
Haskins Laboratories, Inc
270 Crown Street
New Haven, CT 06510

1 Dr. David Kieras
Department of Psychology
University of Arizona
Tuscon, AZ 85721

1 Dr. Walter Kintsch
Department of Psychology
University of Colorado
Boulder, CO 80302

Private Sector

1 Dr. David Klahr
Department of Psychology
Carnegie-Mellon University
Schenley Park
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

1 Dr. Stephen Kosslyn
1236 William James Hall
33 Kirkland St.
Cambridge, MA 02138

1 Dr. Pat Langley
The Robotics Institute
Carnegie-Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

1 Dr. Marcy Lansman
The L. L. Thurstone Psychometric
Laboratory
University of North Carolina
Davie Hall 013A
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

1 Dr. Jill Larkin
Department of Psychology
Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

1 Dr. Alan Lesgold
Learning R&D Center
University of Pittsburgh
3939 O'Hara Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

1 Dr. Jim Levin
University of California
at San Diego
Laboratory fof Comparative
Human Cognition - D003A
La Jolla, CA 92093

1 Dr. Don Lyon
P. O. Box 44
Higley , AZ 85236

1 Dr. Jay McClelland
Department of Psychology
MIT
Cambridge, MA 02139

1 Dr. Tom Moran
Xerox PARC
3333 Coyote Hill Road
Palo Alto, CA 94304

Private Sector

1 Dr. Allen Munro
Behavioral Technology Laboratories
1845 Elena Ave., Fourth Floor
Redondo Beach, CA 90277

1 Dr. Donald A Norman
Cognitive Science, C-015
Univ. of California, San Diego
La Jolla, CA 92093

1 Dr. Jesse Orlansky
Institute for Defense Analyses
1801 N. Beauregard St.
Alexandria, VA 22311

1 Dr. James W. Pellegrino
University of California,
Santa Barbara
Dept. of Psychology
Santa Barabara , CA 93106

1 Dr. Nancy Pennington
University of Chicago
Graduate School of Business
1101 E. 58th St.
Chicago, IL 60637

1 Dr. Martha Polson
Department of Psychology
Campus Box 346
University of Colorado
Boulder, CO 80309

1 DR. PETER POLSON
DEPT. OF PSYCHOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
BOULDER, CO 80309

1 Dr. Lynn Reder
Department of Psychology
Carnegie-Mellon University
Schenley Park
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

1 Dr. Fred Reif
Physics Department
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720

1 Dr. Lauren Resnick
LRDC
University of Pittsburgh
3939 O'Hara Street
Pittsburgh, PA 1521

Private Sector

1 Mary S. Riley
Program in Cognitive Science
Center for Human Information Processing
University of California, San Diego
La Jolla, CA 92093

1 Dr. Andrew M. Rose
American Institutes for Research
1055 Thomas Jefferson St. NW
Washington, DC 20007

1 Dr. Ernst Z. Rothkopf
Bell Laboratories
Murray Hill, NJ 07974

1 Dr. William B. Rouse
Georgia Institute of Technology
School of Industrial & Systems
Engineering
Atlanta, GA 30332

1 Dr. David Rumelhart
Center for Human Information Processing
Univ. of California, San Diego
La Jolla, CA 92093

1 Dr. Arthur Samuel
Yale University
Department of Psychology
Box 11A, Yale Station
New Haven, CT 06520

1 Dr. Emmanuel Donchin
Department of Psychology
University of Illinois
Champaign, IL 61820

1 Dr. H. Wallace Sinaiko
Program Director
Manpower Research and Advisory Services
Smithsonian Institution
801 North Pitt Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

1 Dr. Edward E. Smith
Bolt Beranek & Newman, Inc.
50 Moulton Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

1 Dr. Eliott Soloway
Yale University
Department of Computer Science
P.O. Box 2158
New Haven, CT 06520

Private Sector

1 Dr. Kathryn T. Spoehr
Psychology Department
Brown University
Providence, RI 02912

1 Dr. Robert Sternberg
Dept. of Psychology
Yale University
Box 11A, Yale Station
New Haven, CT 06520

1 Dr. Albert Stevens
Bolt Beranek & Newman, Inc.
10 Moulton St.
Cambridge, MA 02238

1 Dr. Perry W. Thorndyke
Perceptronics, Inc.
545 Middlefield Road, Suite 140
Menlo Park, CA 94025

1 Dr. Douglas Towne
Univ. of So. California
Behavioral Technology Labs
1845 S. Elena Ave.
Redondo Beach, CA 90277

1 Dr. Kurt Van Lehn
Xerox PARC
3333 Coyote Hill Road
Palo Alto, CA 94304

1 Dr. Keith T. Wescourt
Perceptronics, Inc.
545 Middlefield Road, Suite 140
Menlo Park, CA 94025

1 William B. Whitten
Bell Laboratories
2D-610
Holmdel, NJ 07733

1 Dr. Christopher Wickens
Department of Psychology
University of Illinois
Champaign, IL 61820

1 Dr. Thomas Wickens
Department of Psychology
Franz Hall
University of California
405 Hilgarde Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90024

Private Sector

1 Dr. Joseph Wohl
Alphatech, Inc.
2 Burlington Executive Center
111 Middlesex Turnpike
Burlington, MA 01803

DATE
ILME